Menace of Street Begging and Re-Introduction of Traditional Welfare System in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area

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Abstract

Given the imperative of traditional welfare system to human survival, the study seeks to evaluate the menace of street begging and re-introduction of traditional welfare system in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area. Thus, the study was guided with three objectives and three research questions. The paper was anchored on Robert Merton's Strain theory (1938) and culture of poverty theory by Oscar Lewis (1996). However, Robert Merton's Strain theory becomes the main theoretical framework utilized in this study. The study adopted a quantitative method, whereby, the descriptive survey design was used. The questionnaire instrument was used for data collection. The instrument was titled Street Begging and Re-Introduction of Traditional Welfare System Questionnaire (SBRITWSQ). The four likert scale (SA, A, D and SD) were also used. The sample size for the study was 300 and also used convenience and purposive sampling techniques. Mean statistical tool was used for data analysis. The paper reveals that re-introduction of traditional welfare system can control the menace of street begging. Therefore, the study recommended the need for communities to re-introduce the traditional welfare system and avoid personnel possession of properties that brought about inequality and through this, the needs of one becomes a general need and this will help reduce the problem or menace of street begging in our area.

Key words: Street Begging, Re-introduction of Traditional Welfare System

1. Introduction

One social problem that has been an age-long issues and serious concern to well meaning Nigeria is street begging. The problem of street begging is widespread in Nigeria and seen as a global problem. Begging is an antisocial behaviour observed in almost all nations of

the world especially in developing countries. It involves asking for what the beggar does not have or favour. Street begging anywhere is a national disease that eats into the fabrics of the social, economic, religion, political and educational structures. In a nutshell, begging is apparently an indictment on the quality of governance in many societies (Broun, 2010 cited in Jonjon, 2019).

In Nigeria, the history of street begging is uncertain but it is known that street begging has been in existence before the country gained her independence. According to Amman (2009) "Maberatas" who are professional beggars contributed immensely to the widespread of begging in Nigeria. "Maberatas' are those live by asking people for money. Begging has been common since the existence of human civilization and has many different variable and causes within different cultural contexts (Jonjon, 2019).

In Rivers State, there exist various individuals involved in begging along the street, seeking for help to enable them survive. Such situation is not really ideal for human survival. Hence, it becomes imperative for opting to the traditional welfare system, which would usher in hope for survival. Given the menace of begging in our society especially with the rise of covid-19 pandemic, it becomes imperative for this study to suggest foe the re-introduction of traditional welfare system that gives room for collective survival approach that eliminate hunger, poverty and unemployment crisis which perpetrated and advance the issue of begging our locality.

2. Statement of the Problem

With the attainment of independence, many African nations including Nigeria pursued with vigour the policy of intensifying formal education of their citizens. This aspiration is metched by the push for urbanization and industrialization, resulting in the phenomenon of mass exodus of youth to the cities (Nwoye, 2006). Consequently, there was an increasing nuclearization and fragmentation of the modern African family, with attendant consequences. One of these was the collapse of the old structure very ably depicted by Achebe (1958) in his classic Novel, "Things Fall Apart" (Nwoye, 2006).

In view of the above, Foster, et al., (1977) argue that changes such as labour migration, the cash economy, and demographic change. Formal education and westernization have occurred and weakened the extended family structure. Labour migration and urbanization have led to a reduction in the frequency of contact with relatives and encourage social and economic dependence, precession are perceived as personal property and no longer belong to the extended family. Education about social values is likely to be obtained from schools and interactions of children with their peers rather than through traditional mechanisms,

which has lessened the ability of older people to inculcate social control over younger generations (Nwoye, 2006). In this way, some traditional roles of the extended family have been modified whilst others have almost disappeared (Foster, et al., 1997).

It is in the light of the above that this paper intends to look at the street begging menace as a result of the break-down of the values of the Africa family system and its consequences on the individual and society and the role of the social workers in bringing back these values. This problem above becomes worrisome and led to the study on menace of street begging and re-introduction of traditional welfare system in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area.

3. Research Questions

The following research questions were put forth as guide to the study.

(i) What are the causes of street begging in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area?
(ii) What are the menace/consequence of street begging that necessitated the need for re-introduction of traditional welfare system in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area?
(iii) How can the re-introduction of traditional welfare system help to control the menace of street begging in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area?

4. Objectives of the Study

(i) To identify the causes of street begging in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area.
(ii) To find out the consequences/menace of street begging that necessitated the need for re-introduction of traditional welfare system in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area.
(iii) To suggest if re-introduction of traditional welfare system help to control the menace of street begging in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area.

5. Theoretical Framework

The paper is anchored on Robert Merton's Strain theory and culture of poverty theory by Oscar Lewis was also used. However, Robert Merton's Strain theory becomes the main theoretical framework utilized in this study.

The culture of poverty theory: This theory was propounded by Oscar Lewis (1996). An American anthropologist introduced the idea of culture of poverty which has been used to explain the causes of street begging, from the perspective of poverty. He developed the concept from his fieldwork among the urban poor in Mexico and Puerto Rico. He suggests that everywhere poverty is found to exist makes people in those places exhibit feelings of

marginality, helplessness, inferiority and independence. In Nigeria, the poor often develop various ways by which they cope with their conditions in form of take actions and engage in many activities that will ensure a quick escape from the realities of poverty, one of which is street begging which is evident in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area where children are seen on the streets selling for sustenance.

Lewis (1996), stated that the "culture of poverty" theory is presumed on; the level of individual, the parents, care givers and guardians who experience the above feelings suffer from weak ego structure, lack impulse control and show little ability to defer gratification, have a sense of resignation, fatalism and unstable family structure. These qualities therefore make them to believe that giving out their children to labour in a view to earn extra income for family upkeep is their only source of hope (Ering, 2000 cited in Adiele, 2021). Lewis was of the opinion that, these people show a great deal of self-perpetuating patterns and echoes of poverty which succeeding generations could imbibe and exhibits as life styles, belief and value that are not simply an alternative to low income.

The theory has been criticized for painting of generic poverty, which in reality shows distinct and unique features. The relevance of this theory to this study cannot be over emphasized. Given, the level of poverty with so many families in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area are struggling to survive hardship, led to why most parents permits their children to be involved in street begging. Because poverty exist, caused by capitalists, politician and other bourgeoisies, who appropriate wealth meant for all and at the end creates more poverty. Because the traditional system fails, people are bound to suffer and decide to ensure ends meet, involves into street begging despite the menace it emerges. Therefore, the culture of poverty theory by Oscar is well thought-out to be apt for this study.

Strain theory: Nnam (2014) cited in Emeodu (2021) were of the view that the anomie-strain theory highlighted a number of ways in which individuals may adapt to the strains brought by the inability to achieve the society prescribed success goals, adding that not all of these adaptations are deviant or criminal. The adaptation typology also referred to as the "*plus-minus paradigm"* are conformity (+ +) in which goals are accepted and pursued along with the legitimate cultural means; innovation (+ -) in which the goals are pursued but legitimate means are eliminated, and illegitimate means are created and used; ritualism (- +) whereby institutional goals are rejected and the cultural means ritualized as an end in itself as in religious fanaticism; retreatism (- -) in which the goals are means are rejected and the individual withdraws into isolationism and may find solace in drug or alcohol. The fifth adaption mechanism identified by Merton is rebellion (+ +) in which both

the society's institutional goals and approved cultural means are rejected and a new structure is advocated and pursued by the group (Haralambos and Holbom, 2008; Iheriohanma, 2010 and Akikibofori (2018).

Hence, the strain theory has been used to explain increase in a particular type of deviant behaviour in the society. In addition Akikibofori (2018) cited in Emeodu (2021) stated that these happen as design feedback to a breakdown of values and norms of the society. Thus, explains why individuals who fail to meet society goals are involved into begging. This theory by Merton explains that as society's institutional goals and approved cultural means are rejected, a new structure is advocated and pursued by the group through begging as a means to survive in the society.

6. Conceptual Clarification

Traditional Welfare System in Nigeria: In African traditional welfare system, the traditional institution of family and the community members support one another in an interdependent way. Having common family land, fish pond and lakes, payment of marriage bride price, the general welfare of children of immediate family, extended family and the community was cared for by everyone. Other activities like times of sorrow, merriment, war, construction or repair of homes, carving of canoe, clearing of farmland and harvesting, hunting during flood periods etc. In pre-colonial Africa, poverty occurred more as a nonmonetary phenomenon. Wealth was in form of land, chieftaincy titles livestock, skill and vocation, age, wisdom, spirituality, kingship and membership of royalty, social class, etc. The reason why some scholar referred to a Merrie Africa was because it was difficult to refer to a man who lacked money in pre-colonial Africa and poor because the yardstick for measuring poverty was essentially and as stated earlier, non-monetary (Decker, 2010).

Bennel also argue that historical phases such as colonialism had led to the reconstruction of phenomenon of poverty and wealth, which became an increasingly monetary occurrence, particularly with the gradual domination of Western monetary exchange system (Bennel 1982). The continent of the black man, in its historical traditional segmented coloration, exhibited a strong culture of communitarian living before the territory fell to European and colonial institutional and cultural erosions, destroying the social and community connection as well as the extended family system, which existed in Africa in the pre-colonial era. Rodney put this disarticulation thus:

> "In general terms, where communalism came into contact with the money economy, the latter imposed its self. Cash-crop farming and wage labour

> led away from the extended family as the basis of production and distribution. One South African saying put forward that 'the white man has no kin, his kin is money'. That is a profound revelation of the difference between capitalist with the still largely communal African societies, it introduced money relations at the expense of kinship ties (Rodney, 1970)".

Illife also captures this belief when he observed that "only with the coming of colonial rule, market economics, and urbanization, so it is often claimed did things start to fall apart" (Illife, 1987). In fact, it is a popular African belief that according to Illife that:

> "there were no poor and rich; the haves helped those who were in want. No man starved because he had no food; no child cried for milk because its parents did not have milk cows; no orphan or old person starved because there was nobody to look after them. No these things were unknown in ancient Bantu society.

Street Begging: begging is the practice of imploring others to grant a favour, which could be inform of gift like money, clothes or food, shelter, with no expectation of reciprocation or refund. Street begging is define as the act of requesting for money, food or other forms of favour without an exchange in public place and in the street where people frequently pass by Wikipedia (2010) defined street begging as a practice whereby a person obtain money, food, shelter or other things from people he/she encounter in public place by request without return. For Chukwulobe (2011) cited in Jonjon (2019), street begging is seen as an act of stopping people on the street to beg for assistance which could either be in the form of giving money or food. It often occurs for the purpose of securing a material benefit, generally for a gift donation or charitable donation (John, 2010). Thus, Balogun (2012), a street beggar is a person who relies on the financial graces of strangers without providing food or services in return, though it is just as much work as a wage job. Given the above conceptualization, beggars can be categorized based on their appearances and techniques or mode of begging. Based on their appearances, they can be categorized into three groups, which include:

(a) Professional or corporation beggars who find themselves in this trade on the grounds of physical disability, deformity, educated, unemployed, well dresses etc.
(b) Those who street-beg on account of old age.
(c) Those who voluntarily force themselves into the begging class.

Based on their techniques of begging, they are also categorized into three, which include:

(a) **Passive begging:** this type involve in person either sitting or standing in one place with songs or receptacle entreating donations.

(b) **Active begging:** the type of beggars move from place to place with their receptacle soliciting money, gift and

(c) **Aggressive begging:** this technique is one which harsh words and intimidation are used in soliciting for help (Burke, 1999), Horn and Cooke, (2001).

Menace of street begging: Cities across the world are confronted with diverse and complex problem which have socio-economic and physical implications for cities' dwellers. These problems as experienced by cities of less developed countries are enormous and multidimensional in nature (Jelili, 2006). One obvious manifestation of these problems, especially in Nigeria, is begging that is the act of asking people for money, food, clothes etc. (Jelili, 2006). The problem of begging is a social menace, which has negative implication not only for cities' economics, socio-physical environment but also for beggar themselves.

7. Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive survey design. This design is adopted to elicit information on the menace of street begging and the need for re-introduction of traditional welfare system. The sample constitutes 300 respondents selected using convenience sampling technique. The sampled population are traditional leaders, beggars, leadership of religious institutions, women group, community development committee (CDC), selected through purposive sampling technique. Questionnaire instrument was used as instrument for data collection. The instrument was titled menace of Street Begging and Re-Introduction of Traditional Welfare System Questionnaire (SBRITWSQ). The four liker scale (SA, A, D and SD) were also used. Thus, both primary and secondary sources were used for data collection. Finally, mean was used as statistical method of data analysis.

8. Data Presentations and Analysis

Research Question 1: What are causes of street begging in Obio/Akpor LGA?

Table 1: Present mean scores for causes of street begging in Obio/Akor LGA?

S/N	Questionnaire Items	Mean	Remark
1.	Poverty	3.50	Accepted
2.	Poor educational system	2.95	Accepted
3.	Homelessness	3.45	Accepted
4.	Break down of the family system	3.03	accepted
5.	Mental illness and drugs	3.53	Accepted
6.	Unemployment	2.97	Accepted
	Grand mean	**3.23**	**Accepted**

Source: Research Fieldwork (2021)

The table above highlight the causes of street begging in the study area. Item, on poverty as a cause to street begging had a mean score of (3.50), item 2 on poor educational system had a mean score of 2.95. Also, item 4 on breakdown of the family system had a mean score of 3.03, item 5 on mental illness and drugs had a mean score of 3.53, while item 6 on unemployment had a mean score of 2.97.

This implies that all the items are the causes of street begging in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area. The findings of FGN/UNICEF 91990) posited that street begging is an economic situation of poor urban families, where by children were subjected to working conditions, for the survival of the families involves. This is due to the presence of poverty and unemployment. The findings of Fafunwa (2007) on poor educational system shows that educational system foisted on Africans is the one that destroyed more rather than instilling values and skills that can promote entrepreneurship on her citizens, thus making the people to deviate from their traditional practiced, depending on others for survival. Hence, Paully (2018) cited in Jonjon (2019) lamented that this fact had turned many persons to beggar.

Research Question 2: The consequences of street begging that necessitated the need for re-introduction of traditional welfare system in Obio/Akpor LGA?

Table 2: Present mean scores for consequences of street begging that necessitate the need for traditional welfare system

S/N	Questionnaire Items	Mean	Remark
7.	Exploitation and sexual abuse	3.05	Accepted
8.	Kidnapping and prostitution	2.84	Accepted
9.	Accident risks	3.65	Accepted
10.	Police harassment	3.57	accepted
11.	Crime and illegal drugs trade	3.73	Accepted
	Grand mean	**3.73**	**Accepted**

Source: Research Fieldwork (2021)

The above table shows the consequences of street begging that necessitate the need for re-introduction of traditional welfare system. Thus, item on exploitation and sexual abuse had a mean score of 3.05. Item 8 on kidnapping and prostitution had a mean score of 2.84. Item 9 on accident risk had a mean score of 3.63, while item 10 on police harassment had a mean score of 3.57. Finally, item 11 on crime and illegal drugs trade had a mean score of 3.73. The grand mean 3.36 and the fact that all the items were accepted, shows that they constitute consequences of street begging.

Given this, Jonjon (2019) supported these findings when he said that many beggars in the streets risk being kidnapped and forced into the prostitution by individuals. Further, Lynch (2005) findings show that in areas where begging has been banned, beggars risk imprisonment and many beggars becomes victims of police torture and brutality.

Research Question 3: How can re-introduction of traditional welfare system help to control the menace of street begging in Obio/Akor LGA?

S/N	Questionnaire Items	Mean	Remark
12.	Traditional welfare system ensures communal ownership and aid to the needy	3.42	Accepted
13.	Re-introduction of traditional welfare system will neglect the capitalist accumulation of wealth which deals with money and thus reduce begging.	3.56	Accepted
14.	Such re-introduction will ensure that the communal people support each other to own/have fish pond, pay marriage bride price and provide welfare of the children.	3.35	Accepted
15.	There will be support in construction and repair of homes, clearing of farmland and harvesting as well as hunting, as this reduce street begging.	3.75	accepted
	Grand mean	**3.52**	**Accepted**

Source: Research Fieldwork (2021)

The above shows score for re-introduction of traditional welfare system to control the menace of street begging. Thus, item 12 had a mean score of 3.42. Also item 13 had a mean score of 3.56, while item 14 had a mean score of 3.35. Finally, item 15 had a mean score of 3.73. By implication, the items support that they constitute the need for re-introduction of traditional welfare system to control the menace of street begging. The findings of this study reflect the view of Illife (1987) cited in Jonjon (2019) that traditional African belief indicates that there is no poor and rich have helped those who are in want, no man starved because he had no food, no orphan or old person starved because there was nobody to look after them. Thus, Jonjon (2019) revealed that in African traditional welfare system in the Niger Delta Nigeria, the traditional institution of family and the community members support one another in an inter-depend way. Thus, through this in-depend, they reduce and control the scourge of street begging menace that is prevalent in the modern society.

9. Conclusion/Recommendations

The study was able to consider the need for re-introduction of traditional welfare system to reduce the menace of street begging. The study also looked at the causes of street begging. It is obvious that to achieve this there must be collective approach which involves counselling, non-governmental agencies cooperate organizations families community people, government and religions leaders. Given the menace of street begging and the need to re-introduce traditional welfare system, the study recommends the following:

1. These should be need for communities to re-introduce the traditional welfare system and avoid personnel possession of properties that brought about inequality. Through this the problem of one becomes a general need and this will help reduce the problem or menace of street begging in our area.
2. A policy to sanction street begging should be enacted by the government and efforts should be put in place to ensure that such policy is implemented to the letter.
3. To prevent begging, Nigeria status and federal government should take measures against malnutrition, environmental pollution, poor hygiene, inadequate prenatal and postnatal care, water borne diseases, accidents of all types and unemployment.
4. The international community should assist the state in all forms of technical assistance that could help to move towards realization of total eradication of poverty and outbreak of control label disease.
5. Government should make sure that the people who are made dependent by severe disability and other special needs categories have opportunity to achieve a standard of living equal to that of their fellow citizens.

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